

Committee: Jay Boyar, Kelly Cameron, Kernan Chaisson, Yen-Ju Chen, Trish Evans, Nat Finkelstein, Gabriel Nmah, Joy Ragsdale, Suzanne Weiss, Noreene Wells, Ben Wu

Absent: Mark Berman, David Friedman, Grant Moy

Cable Office Staff: Amy Wilson, Andrea Gardner, Keith Watkins

Guest/s: Melissa Adams, Josh Bokee, Al Carr, Briana Gowing, Richard Turner

1. Call to Order/Approval of Agenda, Introduction Meeting began at 7 pm with introductions. Minutes March meeting minutes approved as amended, with minor corrections
2. Guest speakers: Verizon: Al Carr, Franchise Service Manager and Briana Gowing, Assistant Vice President of External Affairs
  - CCAC invited cable providers to discuss transition to digital tv to be final 02/09, and to address some concerns about programming information being made available. CCAC was also interested in any news from the providers on their services, customer service and products offered.
  - Al provided the committee with brochures (Channel line up, Rates and Packages, Fiber optic: Television, Internet and Phone) and a map and an update of service territory listing to date. He also told when service would be offered at the various wire centers. A customer service center soon to be opened at Westfield Wheaton Shopping Center next to the Circuit City. Customers can pay bills and return their set top boxes etc. The target date for opening is June 2008.
  - Verizon does not have the capability to display the PEG channel names or the PEG program content on their guide and do not have plans to offer that. Al explained the Verizon network is different than other cable networks and the Verizon systems are not set up in such a way that local channels and programming can be done. There is only one location where this is being done. Kelly asked Al to explain why their system is set up like this. Al explained that Verizon sends out an annual notice to customers which includes the cable terms and conditions and also includes the channel line up. This issue has been raised in other areas and that Verizon's response is the same. To date Verizon has not received many complaints. Suzanne asked how questions regarding this issue that are raised in other jurisdictions are handled by Verizon. Al stated that their response to inquiries regarding this is the same. Nat asked could a video signal sent out to all the boxes in Montgomery County to each of the PEG channels why Channel 16 is not listed as Maryland Municipal Cable as apposed to "Local Programming?"
  - With regards to the digital transition coming on February 17, 2009, Al responded that Verizon FIOS TV subscribers will not be affected. Verizon is going through its own digital conversion which will take place sooner than the February 2009 scheduled digital transition. Verizon has alerted customers in its annual notice and simulcasts about 40 of the lowest channels on the lineup in both analog and digital. Verizon will get rid of the analog signal and move to digital signal in July. After this date customers will need a set top box from Verizon, a cable card or a QAM tuner. Suzanne asked if one has a digital TV do you still need a converter box with FIOS. Al responded the box may or may not work, but Verizon customers with a basic service package will be provided with a free set top box for some time.
  - Nat inquired about the shortage of high definition boxes and what arrangement would be made for customers who did not received the HD boxes they were scheduled to receive. Al responded there was a shortage but supply has been replenished. Al responded he would find out and get by to the committee.
  - Kernan asked about customers who kept up with Verizon's requirements after the digital transition, should they be fine and are they not required to make any changes in their service Al responded the digital transition should not impact Verizon customers.

- Yen inquired about service in Gaithersburg and also asked about the dates for completion. Briana responded the area is federal property. Verizon does have an ongoing project to place video equipment that's needed in that area. Verizon is in talks with the City of Gaithersburg about a permit and the cable TV franchise but will have to wait until construction is over. Briana is unable to disclose completion dates but is hoping to have an answer soon.
- Joy asked about the availability of FIOS in MDUs. Briana responded there are several hooked up but Verizon has had to negotiate a contract which is more technically complex depending on how the building is set up. She is often contacted by individuals in high rises, condo and MDUs and forwards their information on to a group assigned to start the negotiating process
- Suzanne inquired in general about how Verizon's business has been going since the company entered the county. Briana responded that a little more than a year has passed and that Verizon is doing well. The company has exceeded all the targets in the Cable Franchise agreement; a mild winter helped with construction and Verizon is ahead of projections. Suzanne asked for an update on customer service and call centers. Al responded that in its franchise negotiations Verizon agreed to separate the calls from Montgomery County customers so when Verizon reports to the county starting the first quarter of 2008, the call center statistics would only be reporting those calls that can reasonably be determined as having come from Montgomery County, and that is how they will be reporting.
- Kernan asked for an update on the status of the Rockville build out. Briana responded Verizon is currently in talks with the City of Rockville and is optimistic an agreement will be reached soon and will notify us when there is news. Suzanne thanked Verizon representatives for attending and encouraged them to attend upcoming meetings

Josh Bokee, Director of Government Affairs, Comcast

- Josh reviewed and distributed "Preparing for the Broadcast Digital Television ("DTV"); Impact on Cable Television Households, Digital Transition bumper sticker. Josh provided the committee with an update with regards to the digital transition. Comcast is working on a campaign to educate via their website, design ads in English and Spanish to inform customers. Comcast is also placing an insert explaining the transition in monthly bills.
- Kernan stated he has seen ads where cable companies are using the upcoming digital transition as a means to force customers to move to the digital tier and asked if Comcast had any plans to use the heightened information. Josh said he could not speak to any ads but stated the switch to the digital tier is at the customer's discretion but Comcast is currently focused on educating in its customers. Amy asked if Comcast had any crawls on their channels as a way to inform consumers of the February 17 conversion.
- Suzanne asked what would be involved for consumers with Comcast during the digital conversion. Josh responded there would be no impact. For the digital tier a converter box would be needed by some customers. He could not provide any timelines for further conversion. The primary reason for this is to free up broadband while continuing to expand and provide additional programming. At the time a decision is made regarding this issue Josh would return to update the committee. Suzanne asked if Comcast could provide an advance schedule listing of the channels prior to them being moved to the digital tier. Josh stated he did not have any information at this time.
- Noreen asked if there would be an additional charge incurred if you are an existing customer. Nat further clarified there needs to be some way that customers are informed so that they do not feel

pressured into moving into the digital tier. Kernan made a suggestion that both franchises work to modify information being put out by the current television stations and other organizations. Kelly posed the question to both representatives of what is being done to educating the individuals who are not Comcast or Verizon customers, poor, Spanish speaking, other? He asked what suggestions they would give to the county and cable office to educate these individuals. Josh responded he understands the amount of confusion regarding this issue and Comcast is heavily involved in educating as many of its customers as possible. Both representatives assured the committee of their obligations by the FCC to provide information through bill inserts etc. Amy added the county is currently working with the Office of Consumer Affairs, Briana suggested contacting AARP (American Association for Retired Persons).

- Suzanne asked for an update on customer service issues for this year. Josh responded Comcast does acknowledge there are areas where they could create better efficiencies and effectiveness in providing great customer service. Comcast is working with its call center reps and technicians, while utilizing new technologies to find better processes to improve services. As part of the franchise agreement, Comcast has completed the last of the original fiber net network which was a ten year old project.
- Suzanne asked about customer service under the franchise agreement and whether Comcast is now in compliance. Josh responded that a look at the metrics from December 2006, through now shows that Comcast trends have improved. Both Suzanne and Amy inquired about how Comcast is addressing the issue of missing channels and telephone outages that are not included in these metrics. Josh stated that Comcast is working and communicating with the Cable Office so that they are aware of any outages. Amy concurred there has been improvement in communications.
- Nat spoke to the issue of returning equipment to the Gude location and having to wait in line which may stretch out the door, as customers are attempting to resolve billing issues. His suggestion is to separate their lines into two so that the equipment return line is different than the line that addresses billing issues. Josh thanked Nat and stated he would take this suggestion back to Comcast. Joy told Josh of her concern regarding an issue she has been trying to resolve regarding placing services on her account without being asked. She further explained she has been waiting for a call from a supervisor for days and to date she has gotten no response. Josh apologized and offered to look into this issue.
- Richard Turner, Executive Director, Montgomery Community Television, thanked Comcast for work done on program listings and on screen guides through the PEG channels. He also asked what Comcast is doing different from Verizon and whether the program listing and on screen guides for the PEG channels could be cost-effectively done by Verizon. Richard then asked why both providers couldn't direct customers to their respective websites to get an accurate listing of the program guides. Richard also asked what is being done to ensure delivery of close captioning through set boxes to high definition television sets. Is full captioning being delivered through high definition television sets and digital set top boxes? Briana is not sure about this and will find out. Josh will return with a response; it would be difficult to respond since both systems are entirely different and he is not technical. Suzanne asked both providers to send information to the committee regarding an answer to this question.
- Amy asked Josh to speak on the issue of personnel changes within the Comcast reorganization. Sanford Ames is no longer in the position Area Vice President. There will be no replacement. Kurt Pendleton, the Regional Vice President is now the point person. Josh will continue as our point of contact.

3. Cable Office: Amy Wilson, Acting Cable Manager, Administration and Franchising Services  
Attached: April Cable Office Report, Council MFP Packet (Quarterly Review, Worksession)
  - Financial disclosures for committee members are due by May 15. Keith is the contact point in the office for the committee and any questions should be directed to him.
  - Request for the meeting agenda early to post. Amy stated that the Open Meetings Act required this a week in advance. Suzanne said this was new and asked that this be verified.
  - Cable Office reports will be sent out a week early with links to the packets from County Council.
  - Position description for the Cable Administrator has been completed by OHR (Office of Human Resources) and exemption has been lifted to hire for this position.

Keith Watkins, Investigator

- Review of the Complaint Description Breakdown for 2007 – 2008 by Provider – Review and Q & A. Discussion ensued. Complaint reports will be sent to the committee monthly.
- Keith reminded the committee to submit reimbursement forms. Discussion followed on whether there is a requirement to submit quarterly. It is preferred administratively, but can be less frequent. Keith was going to verify that all meetings related to CCAC are included, such as interviews and MFP

Melissa Adams provided an update on the PEG channels.

4 & 5. Suzanne Weiss, Committee Chair

- Ideas discussed by committee on how to get information out to the public and what role the committee could play in this. Understanding our role as an advisory committee, a suggestion was made to send a letter to the County Executive and County Council with ideas on how to reach the public and thanking them for the effort currently in place to keep constituents informed. Discussion ensued. Amy noted that a draft copy of this letter be sent to the cable office.
- Suzanne has asked if the cable office could keep the committee informed of the concerns of the MFP committee and requested the cable office extend an invitation to council staff to attend the committee meeting so that we are made aware of the needs. The previous staff person had attended all CCAC meetings. Amy asked if it were possible to provide the staff person with a list of questions, but would forward our request. Nat stated that it would be helpful for the committee to know what council expects of them.
- Suzanne inquired as to when the committee vacancy will be advertised. Keith will follow up with the County Executive's office.

6. No public comments

7. Adjournment • Meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm

- Next committee meeting scheduled for Wednesday, May 28th 7 pm, location in COB to be determined.